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DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, INR/NESA  
NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [PINR](#) [MV](#)

SUBJECT: Maldivian Gleanings: Human rights commission established; Prison riots report submitted to President

Refs: Colombo 2113, and previous

(U) Classified by Bruce Lohof, Acting Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

[1](#)1. (C) This edition of Maldivian gleanings reviews the following:

>> Maldivian government establishes national human rights commission

>> Report on September rioting submitted to President Gayoom

>> Former attorney general reflects on Gayoom and country's political system

>> Tourism breaks record

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Human Rights Commission Established  
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[1](#)2. (U) Following through on a promise made during his November 11 inaugural address, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom on December 10 established a Human Rights Commission for the Maldives to act as a "source of human rights information" and "assist in education and promoting awareness and respect for human rights." While the commission's precise terms of reference are still being developed, the Maldivian government announced that the nine-person commission would function "in accordance with the Paris Principles, as adopted by the UN General Assembly, which sets out recommendations for the role, functions, and nature of human rights institutions."

[1](#)3. (U) In a related development, the Maldivian government -- per Gayoom's request in his inaugural address for advice from citizens regarding political and development issues -- announced that it had received 840 proposals for reform from the public. These proposals would be examined in early 2004, the GoRM said.

[1](#)4. (C) COMMENT: The establishment of the commission is a key aspect of Gayoom's reform effort announced in the wake of the September 2003 riots (see below). Exactly how the commission will operate and whether it will be given real powers is not yet clear. If the commission is not given substantive powers and fails to investigate GoRM officials fully, the effort could boomerang on Gayoom, underscoring the widespread perception that he is running the government for himself and his cronies. END COMMENT.

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Report on Prison Riots Provided to Gayoom  
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[1](#)5. (U) Immediately following the September 19 death of a Maldivian prisoner while in custody and the ensuing riots at the prison and on the capital island of Male' (see Reftels), Gayoom appointed a Presidential Commission to investigate what had transpired, and the Maldivian government's role in the inmate's death and shooting at the Maafushi prison. (Note: The Maafushi island prison is located on a separate island a short distance from Male'.) On December 29, the five-person commission, which had spent three months compiling information and interviewing over 300 people, presented its completed report to the President. In accepting the report, Gayoom stated that he would forward its findings to the Attorney General for further action by January

[1](#)5.

[1](#)6. (SBU) (Note: As reported in Reftels, Gayoom has also taken other steps in the wake of the September unrest, including firing 11 National Security Service (NSS) officers and reassigning the NSS deputy. Gayoom also launched an investigation to probe the riots in

Male'. In an effort to spur reform of the antiquated prison system, Gayoom also renamed the "Department of Corrections" the "Department of Penitentiary and Rehabilitation Services." Maldivian officials also traveled to Malaysia and Singapore in mid-December to study the penal system and facilities in those two countries. End Note.)

17. (C) COMMENT: The September unrest was highly traumatic for the Maldives, which is a small, close-knit society unused to violence. Given lingering raw feelings, Maldivians are clearly looking for a serious report and not a whitewash of GoRM actions. For his part, President Gayoom appears to be taking the matter seriously, indicating to the Ambassador in their early December meeting that he intended to make the report public (see Reftel). END COMMENT.

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Former Attorney General on Political Situation  
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18. (C) On December 26, former Maldivian Attorney General Mohammed Munavvar met with poloff in Colombo. Expressing no remorse after being ousted as attorney general during Gayoom's November 11 cabinet reshuffle, Munavvar stated that he was still the Majlis (Parliament) representative from his southern atoll district. He added, however, that he was unsure if he would run for reelection during the next Majlis election in late 2004. Munavvar candidly spoke about his dissatisfaction with the recent presidential election process, stating that Gayoom had received one hundred percent support in the Majlis vote because no one of note had run against him. Regarding Gayoom's long political reign, he said that people were of two minds about the future. When Gayoom's current term ends five years from now, some people want the entire Gayoom clan out of politics altogether. Others, feeling that Gayoom's family was there to stay, were pointing to Gayoom's brother, Abdullah Yameen, Minister of Trade and Industries, or Gayoom's brother-in-law, Ilyas Ibrahim, Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation, as possible presidential successors. Munavvar felt, however, that challenges to Gayoom's regime were growing, especially from a loose opposition organization operating overseas known as the Maldivian Democratic Party.

19. (C) COMMENT: Munavvar has been a close contact of the Mission for some time. As is the case with many Maldivian interlocutors, however, he has usually been relatively tight-lipped about the political situation in the country. Now that he is out of office, he evidently feels that he can be more outspoken -- at least in private. His remarks tend to confirm what we have picked up: many Maldivians -- including some in the leadership circles -- are not fully confident in Gayoom's rule and in his reform efforts. The fact that Munavvar is critical of Gayoom is important: Munavvar remains a very well-known personage in Addu Atoll, a populous region in the southern part of the country. FYI: Per Munavvar's comment, we have vaguely heard of the Maldivian Democratic Party, but have picked up little about its political platform or operations. END COMMENT.

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Tourism sets record  
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10. (U) On December 1, President Gayoom and his wife, Nasreena, personally welcomed the 500,000th tourist to visit the Maldives in 2003 in a ceremony at the Presidential Palace on Male' island. The lucky Italian honoree will receive a complimentary Maldivian vacation. Since Maldivian tourism began some 30 years ago, 2003 has netted the highest number of tourists, with the 500,000 figure being the first time the island nation has crossed that threshold. (Official tourism figures cite 485,000 visitors in 2002 and 460,000 in 2001.) From what contacts within the tourism industry have told us, the numbers of tourists continues to climb: Six new weekly charter flights, including new routes from Central Europe, were recently added, and resorts throughout the island were sold out for the 2003 holiday season.

11. (SBU) COMMENT: Tourism is the key revenue and foreign exchange earner for the Maldivian economy, and is a major reason why Maldivian per capita income is the highest in South Asia. Twenty years ago the industry was still small and undeveloped, but now it includes approximately 90 resorts spread throughout the island chain. After a big dip in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 and a smaller one after the October 2002 Bali bombings, the industry is clearly doing better than

ever. In light of the recent pattern of downturns, however, Maldivian officials remain keenly aware of how sensitive the industry is to the international situation and how important it is that the economy diversifies.  
END COMMENT.

[112](#). (U) Minimize considered.

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